

Paul Noordhof

## *The Success of Consciousness*

According to Honderich's stimulating and provocative theory of consciousness, consciousness, or more precisely, perceptual consciousness is the existence of a world (sometimes Honderich talks of it 'consisting in' a world (Honderich, 2004, p. 130).<sup>1</sup> The world in question is the world of chairs, tables, socks and shoes, trees and leopards and the like. Honderich, like other philosophers contemplating the contents of perceptual experience, is struck by the fact that its proper characterisation seems to involve no intrusion of qualia, sense data or other phenomenological items especially tailor made to characterise it. Instead, the content of perceptual experience seems properly characterised in terms of objects and properties in the world of the kinds listed above.

Some philosophers take this observation to support a certain view of perceptual experience: *Disjunctivism* (of the Naïve Realist kind — qualification omitted hereafter). According to such philosophers, perceptual experiences are not a common kind of mental state but involve at least two distinct kinds. There are the mental states which involve the world appearing to the subject of experience and there are those which involve mere appearance. Such philosophers do not suppose the observation supports a complete theory of perceptual consciousness. Other philosophers take the observation to reveal the representational character of phenomenology. According to these, *Representationalists*, to first approximation, there are no phenomenal differences without representational differences, that is, differences in what is represented about the world (where 'the world' may include facts about our own mental lives). One way of assessing the force of Honderich's theory is to consider the motivation for developing the observation in the way that Honderich prefers against these two alternatives and, in the case of the first, a more ambitious development of

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[1] In this commentary all page references are to Honderich (2004) unless stated otherwise.

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it. This will be the subject matter of the first two sections of the paper. In the third section, I will consider whether Honderich's theory performs well with regard to what he considers a crucial feature of perceptual states, namely that they have causal consequences for our behaviour. In the fourth section, I will discuss Honderich's approach to reflective consciousness and argue that it contains an important insight that representationalists should use to answer a substantial objection against their position — one pressed by Honderich. I close with a brief discussion of the impact of hallucinations on Honderich's theory.

### Disjunctivism

Disjunctivists take Honderich's observation that, when we are perceptually conscious of something, there exists a world, to describe a necessary condition for perceptual consciousness, that is, the distinctive mental state characterised by the first disjunct of their approach: perception. It provides no particular illumination of the nature of consciousness but simply a statement of what the *content* of perceptual consciousness must be like. Honderich's theory of perceptual consciousness is an attempt to develop a theory of perceptual consciousness which takes the phenomenology of perceptual consciousness seriously. The deciding point, between disjunctivism and Honderich's theory, might seem to be — from Honderich's perspective — whether disjunctivism or Honderich's theory best captures this phenomenology. When we are perceptually experiencing a world, do we experience the world as dependent upon ourselves (in particular, according to Honderich, our neural properties), do we experience it as mentally or neurally independent, or is the phenomenological content of our perceptual experiences neutral over these two?

If either the first or third answer is correct, then there is no reason why Honderich should not appeal to the phenomenology of perceptual consciousness to justify his starting point. Unfortunately, the most plausible answer is the second. When we are perceptually conscious of the world, it is presented to us as independent of the perceptual experience we have of it. Our perceptual experience of the world as independent might turn out to be mistaken, or indeed, difficult to justify on reflection. There is also a nice question of what is required of a subject to be able to experience perceptually the world in this way. Nevertheless, phenomenologically speaking it seems to be the case and Honderich takes it that this fact should be determinative of how we develop a theory of perceptual consciousness (pp. 133, 183; Honderich, 2006, p. 5).

In which case, it might be productive to see whether a development of the disjunctivist's approach to perceptual experience may provide an account of perceptual consciousness. At one point, Honderich expresses his position in the following fashion: a subject is perceptually conscious if and only if there exists a world *for the subject* ('*for me* a world exists', p. 130, my italics). We might agree with that and emphasise that the world which exists for a subject is just a part of the subject/neurally independent spatiotemporal world — viz. that part of which the subject is currently aware.

Honderich rejects a theory of exactly this type (pp. 133–4, 154, 184). His concern is that such a theory would not be sufficiently illuminating. It seems to involve the claim that S is perceptually *conscious* if and only if S is *aware* of a world i.e. some portion of the objective spatiotemporal world. If awareness is nothing but consciousness, the worry goes, little advance is made. All the work is being done by awareness in selecting from the complete subject/neural independent spatio-temporal world, that part which is for the subject. Put baldly like that, it is hard not to agree with Honderich.

However, the dismissal is rather too swift. Proponents of a disjunctivist account of consciousness may distinguish between two types of theories of consciousness: the first characterises what must be the case for there to be consciousness and the second characterises the way in which this is done. They may identify a product/process ambiguity which serves to obscure these two roles since, obviously, one way to characterise the process involved is in terms of its results. Thus, they will go on, what there must be for perceptual consciousness to be present is a *process of awareness* which makes a portion of the subject, or the neurally independent spatiotemporal world, *for the subject*. This account is not unilluminating since it rules out the possibility of perceptual consciousness without presentation and it talks of a process of awareness whose proper characterisation need not ultimately involve the very terms Honderich uses to characterise perceptual consciousness. Of course, Honderich and others would press: Exactly what is this process of awareness? How are we to characterise it? Indeed, the sceptic may insist that once we have made this distinction to characterise perceptual consciousness in the way that we have done and say no more about the process of awareness is to leave what is of most importance out of the theory of consciousness.

One response to this scepticism is to insist that philosophy cannot do everything. It can identify the necessary conditions for perceptual consciousness to be present but at a certain point — in the characterisation of the process of awareness say — there is nothing more that

philosophy can do and we must look to science to take over. I think that this would be an overly defeatist response on behalf of the philosopher. I'll explain why in the next section. In this one, I want to explore whether Honderich's own development of the idea of consciousness as existence avoids simply characterising a certain kind of thing as consciousness-conferring and hoping that science may fill in the details. It seems to me that the answer is no.

As I have already indicated, the crucial difference between the theory just sketched and Honderich's own theory is that the existence of a world (which, according to Honderich, *is* perceptual consciousness) is dependent upon the neural properties of a particular subject (pp. 136, 154). Strikingly, Honderich's explanation of perceptual consciousness is — in terms of its explanation of the *consciousness* bit — no different from one which might have been offered by sense datum theorists.

It would be quite compatible with their approach to suppose that the presence of sense data or qualia is nomically dependent upon a subject's neural properties. Then, for such theorists by analogy, perceptual consciousness is the existence of sense data or qualia. A natural objection to make against the sense data or qualia theory is that we have here no explanation of consciousness but rather something which presupposes an explanation of it in order to make sense of qualia or sense data. These are understood to be things of which we could not fail to be aware. But what exactly is it to be a thing like that?

Precisely the same objection may be raised against Honderich's theory. The objects of his perceptual world also seem to require characterisation in terms of the impossibility of failure of awareness. Of course, Honderich has other reasons to reject sense datum or qualia theories of perceptual consciousness. I don't want to disagree with him about their force. However, it appears he has no objection to the *structure* of the theory that such a sense datum theorist would provide, namely in terms of neurally dependent objects, even if he differs over what these are.

Honderich's answer to this concern seems to be that all he has suggested is that the perceptual world *nomically depends* upon certain neural properties in a particular subject (pp. 157–8, 161). Here we have no appeal to objects or properties which cannot exist without consciousness of them. Put baldly like that, though, we have the possibility of consciousness without a subject. If it is the perceptual objects which are consciousness, then it should be possible for these objects to occur in a world with slightly different laws without any subjects or neural properties at all. Consciousness is not, contrary to

advertisement, different from the objective spatiotemporal world. It is simply that part of the objective spatiotemporal world that displays a dual nomological dependency.

To avoid this consequence, we might make a slight adjustment to Honderich's theory. Human subjects have neural properties and, in addition, intrinsic properties which are nomically dependent upon them. Suppose further that the spatiotemporal objects in the world may also be characterised in terms of their relation to these intrinsic properties. For instance, a chair may exist without the intrinsic properties of the brain. However, the chair-as-cause-of-intrinsic-property- $I_1$  could not exist without the presence of  $I_1$  while being only nomologically dependent on neural properties. Specify the intrinsic properties of the brain with the right degree of complexity — so that they would not be present without the brain being conscious — and there is no prospect of consciousness without subjects.

With or without this adjustment, there is an obvious worry about Honderich's approach. With the adjustment, we may note that there are many objects we might define as a result of many different intrinsic properties nomically dependent upon neural properties. Not all of them constitute perceptual consciousness. So the question is: which do? In terms of the unadjusted theory, there are many objects we may specify in terms of a nomological dependency upon neural properties prior to conscious processing and also dependent upon the environment. What's special about those objects which constitute perceptual consciousness? Is Honderich able to say anything more than that they are the consciousness-conferring ones?

Perhaps Honderich will say: we can start by putting it like that but we will be able to give another specification of these properties which don't use these terms. It's not immediately obvious what this will be since shape, colour and other sensory properties aren't naturally thought of as properties whose existence depends upon the current existence of certain neural properties. In any case, the proponent of the disjunctivist account of perceptual consciousness will have the same expectation to be able to characterise the awareness-conferring process independently. Both have this gap in their accounts which, if Honderich is right, should not figure in the full philosophical theory of consciousness.

### **Representationalism**

Honderich's fundamental reason for rejecting representationalist accounts of consciousness seems to be that he sees nothing clear in the notion of intentionality when applied to perceptual consciousness.

He offers a different bundle of reasons for each putative account of intentionality but a key consideration, which he keeps coming back to, is that an (allegedly) definitive characteristic of intentionality is the impossibility of existential generalisation for subject terms and yet intentionality is taken to be a relation (pp. 164, 167–8, 173, 177). Here is Honderich at his most trenchant on the issue:

It is no good tripping lightly past the so-called ‘problem’ of a non-existent term of a relation. This is in fact a simple contradiction. The relation of representation or whatever is indeed presented as a relation. What we are thus offered is a nonsense — the nonsense of the possibility of a dyadic relation with one term, the nonsense of a relation between a something and a nothing (p. 168).

Two points are relevant here. First, not all representations have a meaning independent of the existence of the items they signify. Demonstratives and indexicals are examples. So it is open to representationalists about perceptual consciousness to claim that the kind of representations involved are of a similar character. The meaning of these representations will involve a relation. The meaning of other terms — for instance, a fountain of youth — may involve relations to the constituents e.g. fountains or youths — but nothing which is a relation to the whole putatively non-existent entity: the fountain of youth. What relations are required and whether the relations must be to those entities which currently exist or existed in the past are nice issues which seem not to be dealt with by a simple argument to the effect that there is no relation which may hold between a representation and a *currently* non-existent thing it represents.

Second, Honderich himself provides a non-relational account of (derived?) intentionality when he turns to talk of reflective consciousness. He claims that representations are representations because they share to some extent the causal role of that which they represent (p. 193). If that’s right, then I presume that representations of different things have different causal roles. Does Honderich assert this and yet deny that the causal roles of these representations serve to determine what is represented by the representations? If not, then presumably this will allow a relation to hold between the representation and what is represented in cases where what is represented does exist and, when it does not, we correctly characterise what is represented in terms of this nonexistent thing because the representation has the causal role that thing would have if it were to exist (cf. p. 171).

If representationalism is still a viable prospect, then it enables us to say something more about the process of awareness specified in the

previous section. Part of its characterisation, we can now see, will be that it has states with representational properties explaining why a particular part of the objective spatio-temporal world is the object of awareness. Just saying this, of course, does not complete the story. We need to consider whether non-conscious representational states are possible and what distinguishes between conscious presentational states like perceptions and conscious non-presentational but representational states such as beliefs and thoughts. In the present paper, I shall offer nothing on the first question partly because, to do so, would be to take us too far away from the detail of Honderich's work. On the second question, in the section after next I shall make a suggestion drawn from an observation by Honderich.

### **Mental Efficacy**

Honderich holds that his theory of perceptual consciousness as existence can allow for the efficacy of the mental. His line is that since perceptual consciousness is the existence of spatiotemporal objects, albeit neurally dependent, and the latter are efficacious, perceptual consciousness is efficacious (pp. 152–4, 218–19). He writes

consciousness as existence, particularly in connection with perceptual consciousness, makes epiphenomenalism the mad proposition that the external world, so to speak, is causally inefficacious with respect to consciousness (pp. 218–19).

It is questionable whether Honderich is entitled to this conclusion.

At least two puzzles arise in Honderich's picture. The first concerns the relationship between the objects of a subject's perceptual world and spatiotemporal objects of science (hereafter, objective spatiotemporal objects). These objects are not identical since the objective spatiotemporal objects can exist independent of a particular subject's neural properties whereas the perceptual objects cannot. Perceptual objects seem to have all the properties of objective spatiotemporal objects, apart from these objects' objectivity, with additional neurally dependent essential properties.

If that's right, then a version of a familiar concern arises. Just as we might ask whether it was in virtue of the mental or non-mental physical properties of mental events that they were causes of behaviour, so we might ask whether it is the perceptual objects or the objective spatiotemporal objects that are efficacious. Or, alternatively, without making the options mutually exclusive, whether the objects are efficacious in virtue of being perceptual objects or in virtue of simply being spatiotemporal objects. I see no reason to believe that any significant

efficacy attaches to an object such as a chair in virtue of it being a perceptual object. Its spatiotemporal properties will be responsible for its effects on the neural properties of a subject. Those of its properties which are dependent on a particular subject's neural properties will not be causes of these neural properties. The neurally dependent properties will be constitutively related to the intrinsic non-neural properties which, in turn, are nomically dependent upon the neural properties.

Now it may be that there is an answer to this worry but until we are clearer about the connection between perceptual objects and spatiotemporal objects and how the efficacy of the properties of one may imply the efficacy of the properties of other, Honderich's theory has at least as many difficulties as alternative more standard accounts. Indeed, his position may be in worse shape. This brings me to the second puzzle.

It is not enough that consciousness is granted an efficacy. It must have the right efficacy. Nobody would suppose the horrors of epiphenomenalism avoided if we had a theory which made consciousness irrelevant to behaviour and other mental states and yet relevant to the flaring of sunspots. Of course, things aren't as bad as that for Honderich's theory! However, it is not clear how Honderich's theory makes consciousness a cause of a subject's behaviour. Unlike the objective spatiotemporal objects, Honderich takes the perceptual objects to be nomically dependent upon a subject's neural properties. The perceptual objects are not, themselves, causes of the instantiation of these neural properties. It is plausible that we behave in the way we do because of the instantiation of neural and perhaps other intrinsic properties of the brain. In which case, how do perceptual objects — those objects which are consciousness according to Honderich — cause behaviour?

### **Reflective Consciousness and Presentation**

According to Honderich, reflective consciousness is the existence of representations rather than the existence of a perceptual world. So, as I have already noted, it appears that Honderich does not reject the possibility of representations nor, indeed, intentionality (p. 196). His earlier argument against the very coherence of intentionality must have an answer (p. 168). What he is left with is the claim that, while it might be appropriate to appeal to intentionality in order to understand reflective consciousness, it is inappropriate for the proper understanding of perceptual consciousness.



We have already seen that one reason for arriving at this view – namely that perceptual consciousness cannot concern something which does not exist — is ill founded (p. 165). There are representations that only have significance if they have referents e.g. demonstratives and indexicals. A second reason, though, is rather more promising. It is the claim that there is a significant phenomenal difference between belief, say, and perception. The latter involves presentation of objects whereas the former does not (p. 165).

In fact, Honderich's contrast of reflective consciousness with perceptual consciousness suggests a solution to the representationalist's difficulty. Honderich argues that reflective consciousness is just the existence of representations. These characterise the content of our reflectively conscious states in much the same way as perceptual objects in Honderich's sense capture the content of our perceptually conscious states. Representationalists should agree about this characterisation of the phenomenal character of conscious belief. We are conscious of the representation properties of the belief rather than what is represented by the belief e.g. the images and sentences we entertain in thinking this or that. Thus, when we consciously judge or think that *p*, although *p* might be the proper specification of the content of the state, the object of consciousness is not what is represented — that *p* — but rather the representational properties of the state — the properties doing the representing.

Representationalists should just insist that in the case of perceptual consciousness matters are quite different. Perceptual states present the world *in virtue of* their representational properties. By this, I do not mean that they are intermediaries any more than experiences are intermediaries when we experience the world. The 'in virtue of' characterisation does not always serve to introduce an intermediary as opposed to, in this case, enabling us to talk of features of an experience which make it the kind of experience it is. The simple thought is that a state's representational properties may determine the content of consciousness in two ways: either by what they represent or by being the object of consciousness. Recognising this provides representationalists with the resources to distinguish between the phenomenal content of perception and belief.

### Concluding Remarks

It is the fate of stimulating, provocative and paradigm-shifting theories to be criticised. This fate has not escaped Honderich's theory in the present paper — where normal philosophy (presumably an accompaniment of normal science) has asserted itself. I have argued that, in

phenomenological terms, Honderich's theory is less well supported than a disjunctivist alternative. I have developed this disjunctivist alternative within a representationalist framework and explained how Honderich's attack on intentionality must founder, even by his own lights, given his later willingness to understand reflective consciousness intentionally (Honderich, 2004, p. 196). Finally, I have explained how representationalists can capture the difference between perception and belief which was the other source of support for Honderich's position. The last two points don't show that Honderich's theory is mistaken but just question its motivation. The first point, together with the problems relating to mental causation, provide some grounds for questioning Honderich's approach.

A final reason for caution stems from test cases involving hallucinations or brains in vats. Honderich rejects the latter as a problem. He considers it a recommendation of his theory that it puts forward a testable hypothesis that might — though he suggests it will not — be refuted if brains in vats correctly take themselves to be perceptually conscious (pp. 154–6). Brains in vats, of course, are hard to produce and so actual verification of Honderich's claims here are some way off. Realistic hallucinations as a result of drug taking are not. They exist, subjects are awake during them, and it seems to them that certain items exist in the world. What does Honderich say about this type of case?

It seems to me that the only thing he can say about them is that these subjects are mistaken about the phenomenology of their mental lives. They take it that there is the existence of a world but in fact there isn't. Perhaps the subjects aren't conscious at all or perhaps they are reflectively conscious. What he cannot say is that reflective consciousness supplies the very same phenomenology (albeit in a different manner) on pain of undermining his grounds for supposing that perceptual consciousness is the existence of a world in the first place. However, if he does claim that subjects are mistaken about their phenomenology, then he opens up a gap which he rejected in his initial characterisation of perceptual consciousness as the existence of a world. He writes

there is every reason for taking the seeming nature of all consciousness simply to be its very nature, the full reality of it (p. 183).

The appearance-reality distinction does not apply to consciousness it seems. But if we can be mistaken over whether a particular phenomenology involves the existence of a world, then there is a distinction between the appearance of consciousness and its reality.

The plausibility of Honderich's theory stems from the fact that it states the success conditions of consciousness. Honderich is right that when we are perceptually conscious it seems to us that there is a world. That's what perceptual consciousness must provide us with if it is to count as perceptual consciousness of some kind or another. However, Honderich's attempt to derive a substantive theory of consciousness from it is problematic if the reasons given above are sound.

### References

- Honderich, Ted (2004), *On Consciousness* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).
- Honderich, T. (2006), 'Radical externalism', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 13 (7–8), pp. 3–13. [This issue]

### REPLY TO NOORDHOF BY HONDERICH

Doubt does not arise in my mind about whether Paul Noordhof's paper is a good one. But I have found it hard to get a hold of all of it. Maybe the reason is a common one — another philosopher's immersion in a local doctrine or doctrines and hence a use of labels, abbreviations and styles familiar to a group of comrades but not the rest of us, or not yet the rest of us. Does a disbelief in anything else go along with this immersion, indeed an attempt to reform anything else into something akin to local doctrine?

If, reader, you take those opening remarks as intended to convey a certain superiority, your impression should be affected by also hearing that I am aware that the labels, abbreviations and styles of Radical Externalism are not exactly a philosophical *lingua franca*. Rather, my remarks are meant to explain why it seems best in what follows to make my way through Noordhof's paper in a pedestrian way, registering some items as they come into view, rather than attempting an overview of the geography, let alone a geology.

He says in his first paragraph that for Radical Externalism the proper characterization of what it is for something to be perceptually conscious is for a world to exist. The world in question, he then says, is the world of chairs, tables, socks and shoes, tree and leopards and the like. It is natural to take him to be referring to just the physical world. Well, as you will know from earlier pieces in this book, that is definitely *not* the world in which my perceptual consciousness is said to consist by Radical Externalism.

In a word, the theory is a kind of near-physicalism, not devout physicalism. Also, it is not any theory that somehow makes the physical world what is called the *content* of perceptual consciousness, which consciousness also has something else in it. Radical Externalism intrudes into consciousness no phenomenological

items, these at least typified by sense data or by qualia as sometimes understood. And, as perhaps needs to be added, Radical Externalism intrudes into perceptual consciousness nothing else in addition to a world either — of which, more in a minute or two.

Whatever characterization or observation of or about worlds or content supports whatever theory, it is perhaps implied by Noordhof in his second paragraph, and subsequently that the complete theory of Radical Externalism is supported or motivated only or principally by the proposition about what is given in consciousness. That is not the case at all. What is given in consciousness is part of the best introduction to the theory and one strong argument for it, but not more than that.

Disjunctivism in one main form is a response to the argument from illusion. The doctrine is to the effect that while there may be no difference whatever in consciousness between your seeing a leopard and your really hallucinating one, this does not show that on both occasions your consciousness is to be characterized in terms of sense data or the like. Your consciousness across such occasions, can be either one sort of thing or another. This consciousness, so to speak, is disjunctive.

Actually seeing a leopard is to be understood somehow along the lines of direct realism or what was once called naive realism. That is, seeing a leopard is to be understood as your somehow being in direct touch with a leopard, or, yet more obscurely, as the fact that the physical leopard can be said *partly to constitute* the experience. The story with the hallucination, whether or not precisely sense data are mentioned, is entirely different.

This either-or nature of some consciousness, I take it, is what is conveyed by Noordhof's saying in his second paragraph that there are perceptual experiences, where the world appears to the subject of experience, and there are perceptual experiences, in my view wonderfully unhelpfully so called, that involve mere appearance. Notice that with the first sort of thing there are, so to speak, two elements, whatever is said of phenomenology. There is the world and there is the appearing of the world. In the second sort of thing there is only the second element.

At the start of his section on disjunctivism, Noordhof remarks that what Radical Externalism takes perceptual consciousness to be, a world, is what disjunctivists take to be a necessary condition for true perceptual consciousness. That is at least misleading. A world of the first kind, so far as I know, is no part at all of disjunctivism, which has to do in part with exactly the physical world. That is as definite as what was noted above, that Radical Externalism

supposes a world of perceptual consciousness *not* to be the physical world.

To which can be added that it is not only disjunctivism that makes the physical world a necessary condition for perceptual consciousness. So in quite a different way does Radical Externalism — a world of perceptual consciousness is dependent partly on the unperceived physical world. The physical world is somehow constitutive of it.

Noordhof supposes in the early paragraphs of his first section that disjunctivism does better than Radical Externalism in capturing the phenomenology of our perceptual consciousness — disjunctivism does better in saying what we are *given* in consciousness. This rating, however, is based on a misapprehension — that it has ever been a proposition of Radical Externalism that what is given to me when I see a leopard is in part that the experience is dependent on my neural properties. In fact that would surely be remarkable speculation. It puts a cause within an effect. On the contrary, that what is given to me is in a way no more than a leopard, as you have heard already, is fundamental to Radical Externalism.

It is true that Radical Externalism takes what we are calling the phenomenology of perceptual consciousness seriously. But, as you have heard already, it does not suppose for a moment that in order to have a decent theory of consciousness we need not or cannot attend to anything else. It does not suppose there is no other deciding point, nothing else determinative. Reflection about consciousness, not to mention an overwhelming fact of common sense and neuroscience, supplies to us the proposition of a dependence of my perceptual consciousness on my brain. To repeat, Radical Externalism really cannot be supposed to take what we are given when we are perceptually conscious to be itself *determinative* of a theory of perceptual consciousness. Remember those various criteria for a successful theory.

Nor, of course, to pause for a moment, is the neural dependency proposition, or the proposition of dependency on the physical world, merely thrown in. Actually paying attention to your consciousness, engaging in mental realism, gives you the idea that what it is for you to be conscious is for something somehow to exist. You can go on to explain that idea, come to a clear proposition, partly by way of the dependency propositions. Both are essential to, indeed parts of, the proposition that a certain state of affairs exists — which proposition is the theory's answer to what is the case when we are perceptually conscious.

So, might it be productive to develop an alternative disjunctivist theory as against Radical Externalism? Are we prompted to that by a lower rating of Radical Externalism with respect to the phenomenology? Certainly not in my view. It gets the highest rating. It seems to me no reason has been given for trying to develop an alternative theory.

Further, a theory to the effect that a subject is perceptually conscious if and only if there exists a world *for the subject* sounds like a theory that is circular in being about something you can call a mental world. It is impossible, isn't it, to take a subject to be other than a *conscious* subject? Certainly my book, including the cited p. 130, does not commit me to such a circularity. In quotations, say the quotation that '*for me a world exists*', beware the quoter's italics!

Nor would it be a good idea to persist with a misleading if tentative line or two of mine, open to being misunderstood as to the effect that a world of perceptual consciousness is *dependent on a subject* rather than on a brain. (Read instead the other lines that conceive of a subject naturalistically — in fact, at bottom, neurally [2004, p. 143].) Here too, talk of a traditional non-neural subject produces circularity in an analysis of consciousness — to me wonderfully underdescribed by Noordhof as something 'not ... sufficiently illuminating' (p. 111). A good circularity, as I understand one, is about as illuminating as a coal-hole.

This dismissal is rather too swift for Noordhof. He supposes that light can be shed in such an account — which, incidentally, seems to have nothing essential to do with disjunctivism. The light is owed to the account's including *two* theories of consciousness.

... the first characterizes what must be the case for there to be consciousness and the second characterizes the way in which this is done. ... what there must be for perceptual consciousness to be present is a *process of awareness* which makes a portion of the subject, or the neurally independent spatiotemporal world, *for the subject* (p. 111).

Not a lot can be said by me of this since what is said initially of the two theories is unclear to me, and the second sentence of the quoted passage is defeating. There is no keystroke error or the like in the sentence, and so what it comes to, in form, is indeed that *something makes something for the subject*. If there is grammar there, there is not much else for me. Still, I do indeed press the objection that it is not enlightening to explain consciousness by way of a seemingly unexplained process of awareness.

Moving forward quickly, past the idea that to dismiss a circularity as useless in analysis is merely to be a *sceptic*, I come to the question of whether Radical Externalism's own development of the idea of consciousness is circular. Or, at any rate the question of whether it

is involved in a defeatist strategy for philosophy of leaving science to explain something. The answer, for Noordhof, is yes. In explanation of this, he says the crucial difference between Radical Externalism and the account made up of two theories is that Radical Externalism makes the existence of a world dependent on the neural properties of a particular person. Indeed it does.

What takes me aback, and does not make me confident in writing this reply, is the conclusion drawn from that premise — which conclusion would certainly make Radical Externalism circular. The conclusion is the proposition that Radical Externalism, at least in some important respect or bit or other, is no different from the explanation of perceptual consciousness given by sense datum theorists. What Radical Externalism comes to, very briefly, is that to be perceptually conscious is to experience sense data.

The proposition just doesn't follow from the premise that Radical Externalism makes perceptual consciousness dependent on neural facts. Or, I'm inclined to guess, it doesn't follow unless the respect or other in which it does follow is not very important.

To linger a little longer here, *of course* a sense datum theory of consciousness is likely to make consciousness neurally dependent. Has there been any half-serious theory of consciousness since 1900, say, that hasn't done so? But that is not the main response that is needed here. It is that Radical Externalism explains what it is for you to be perceptually conscious as the existence of a state of affairs outside of you. Could anything be more remote from the theory of sense data? The latter is indeed a theory of a somehow mental world, an inner world.

You, reader, may well do better with these thoughts against Radical Externalism than I am doing. Also with the later thought that Radical Externalism is committed to the possibility of consciousness without a traditional subject, which most certainly it is — whatever is put in the place of that idea that demands some attention.

Here I do grant that there is room for some industry, but of course industry consistent with what the theory has to say of perceptual, reflective and affective consciousness. Let me remark only that the *uniqueness* assigned to a conscious subject can be regarded as partly a matter of the uniqueness of a world of perceptual consciousness and the uniqueness of related facts of reflective and affective consciousness.

Added to the embarrassments for Radical Externalism so far enumerated is the somehow related one that it makes perceptual consciousness into external things that might exist in a different world, a world with different laws, even if there were no subjects or neural properties in it. Let me stick to neural processes or the like

— forget about subjects — and happily accept that something like that is conceivable. So what? It's *this* world that we're in, the only one there is, of which we have different conceptions. And it's this world of which we are analysing something in it, which thing is perceptual consciousness.

I leave it to others better informed with respect to the idea of *intrinsic* properties of human subjects to look into the rest of Noordhof's section on disjunctivism. I do allow that this may be time well spent. It will have to deal with the idea, however, that colour is a sensory property that is *not* dependent on the existence of neural properties or the like. That, I take it, will be as much of a surprise to neuroscience now as it would have been to Locke, Berkeley and Hume. Kant too? Maybe there is more misunderstanding between us here.

To come on to the short section on representationalism, this doctrine was introduced as being supported by the fact that no such phenomenological items as sense data or qualia of a kind are given to us in perceptual consciousness. Rather, what we are given is such as to

reveal the representational character of phenomenology. ...there are no phenomenal differences without representational differences, that is, differences in what is represented about the world (p. 109).

I need more instruction here, but less so when we get on to something related, which is the supposed intentionality or relation of aboutness within perceptual consciousness.

It has been one of my complaints about this that we are given no representation, sign or such-like in perceptual consciousness — just the leopard — and hence we are not given a term of a supposed relation. It is not just sense data that are missing from perceptual consciousness. Another complaint, noted by Noordhof, is that what we are supposed to get here is a kind of relation, clarified with reflective consciousness as against perceptual consciousness, such that the other term of the supposed relation, the thing represented, can be missing. No fountain of youth.

To the second complaint, Noordhof replies, maybe truly, that some representations have meanings that are dependent on the existence of what they represent — demonstratives and indexical terms like 'this' and 'that'. Well, for a start, that they have a meaning dependent on the existence of a referent does not give us the proposition that it is a matter of a certain relation, precisely a supposed relation that also holds in cases where there is *no* referent.

But anyway, none of this is about perceptual consciousness. Certainly Radical Externalism *has* a relation of representation or



intentionality in what it says of reflective consciousness. Nor, I take it, does Noordhof's use of Russell's Theory of Descriptions help out with perceptual consciousness.

Noordhof has questions about the fundamental relation of representation allowed by me with respect to reflective consciousness. However, I am unsure of the relevance of this to what presumably remains our subject, which is perceptual consciousness. As for my complaints about the supposed relation of intentionality within perceptual consciousness, certainly they do not apply with respect to the fundamental relation of representation supposed by me with reflective consciousness — that something is a representation of something if, for a start, it shares some effects with that thing.

With respect to this idea of representation, there is again a want of understanding between us. I hurry to *assert* what it seems I am expected to deny, that it is precisely effects of a thing that at least enter into determining what it represents. I readily allow that Radical Externalism has so far contained no worked-out account of reflective consciousness and hence representation. Maybe it has a good or promising idea in it of what a representation is, certainly better than the idea that it is an effect of what is represented.

The short section on mental efficacy rightly reports that my being conscious of this room, taken as a certain spatiotemporal state of affairs, can evidently be supposed to be causally efficacious with respect to my behaviour. That is, to take up Noordhof's terminology, perceptual spatiotemporal objects can be taken as in no danger of making Radical Externalism into an epiphenomenalism. However, there is said to be trouble for this complacency when we remember that there is also the physical world — objective spatiotemporal objects as against perceptual spatiotemporal objects.

The trouble is discerned when it is remembered, as it was by Stephen Law (p. 66), that it can be asked of such an account of a mental event as Davidson's whether it is the mental or the physical properties of the event that are causally effective. The supposed trouble is more easily discerned, of course, when you help yourself to the proposition that a perceptual spatiotemporal object *is* the related objective spatiotemporal object. You come nearly to the trouble when you ask if it is the object's being spatiotemporal or the object's being perceptual that is doing the work. You *get* to the trouble — epiphenomenalism — when you suppose it has to be the object's being spatiotemporal rather than its being perceptual that is doing the work.

The short reply to this is that there are two objects in question, both spatiotemporal, and it is the one that is in a world of perceptual

consciousness that is doing the work — which it can do in virtue of being spatiotemporal. There are two objects in question because, for a good start, they have *different* properties. Your perceptual spatiotemporal object, owed to where you stand, is different from the related objective spatiotemporal object, which latter thing is precisely *not* owed just to where you stand, etc.

Whatever else is to be said, whatever development of Radical Externalism is needed with respect to relations between kinds of objects and worlds, there seems to be no objection to it here. It is exactly not like Davidson's Anomalous Monism in the relevant respect. There is nothing whatever in it that puts any obstacle in the way of perceptual consciousness having efficacy.

Finally here, it needs remembering that what is wrong with certain theories of consciousness is that they make psychophysical relations impossible, in particular make it impossible to see how thoughts and feelings can cause actions. This epiphenomenalism is enough for disaster. The disaster is *not* that they do not give a full account of how thoughts and feelings cause particular actions rather than others — or the flaring of sunspots. Radical Externalism, whatever you may want to add to it, is not an epiphenomenalism.

The section on reflective consciousness and representation starts in a way that may mislead a reader. It does not only *appear* that I do not reject something, but rather accept it. That thing, in a brisk sentence, is an account of reflective consciousness that gives a place to a certain relation. I plainly and categorically assert that (p. 9). As Noordhof indeed remarks, Radical Externalism is motivated in part by another matter of phenomenology — what you can call differential phenomenology. There is a big general difference of consciousness between seeing green and doing philosophy, and between each of them and wanting something to eat.

Partly for this reason, representation is made no part of the story with perceptual consciousness, but all or the basis of the general story with reflective consciousness. There is no surprise in this and no reason to suspect that the first story casts doubt on the second. As for the relation, it is a fact that a representation or symbol is related to what it represents, at least, in that it has some of the effects of the thing represented or symbolized. That is wholly different from the usual stuff about intentionality (Honderich, 2004, pp. 159–81).

I am glad this may be of use to representationalists, whatever they are, and hope it will lead them in the direction of a clear and argued theory of the nature of consciousness, maybe one not a long way from here.

The first of Noordhof's concluding remarks, to the effect that he is defending the philosophical equivalent of Kuhn's normal science against a proposed paradigm shift, supposes a little confidently that there is now a paradigm in the philosophy of mind. There certainly isn't a Newton. Maybe something that can have the name of being normal philosophy will persist. Indeed it must be likely that it will. But clearly there is overwhelming disbelief with respect to devout physicalism and also to spiritualism when it is actually thought about. Maybe it is the role of Radical Externalism just to make more likely *some* departure from a lot of the philosophy and science of mind that we have.

Noordhof ends with hallucinations, and gives further expression to the demand for concession from me. Having already made the concession and other responses (above, pp. 24–5, 39–40, 56–9, 93), let me add only that he is right to point to a problem in my taking a brain in a vat to be a case of reflective consciousness or something of the sort. Whatever is to be said here will have to be in line with the proposition that all that there is to consciousness itself is what is *given*. I did see that, but now see it with more of a sense of thinking that needs to be done by someone. I reject, as you know, that the stuff about phenomenology is near to constituting *the grounds* for Radical Externalism.

It is good if surprising to have Noordhof's acceptance, if that is what it is, of the strategy of stating a number of success conditions for a theory of consciousness. Also his granting that Radical Externalism meets one of them, the one having to do with what seems to be the case or what is given to us when we are perceptually conscious. I await his account of how disjunctivism and representationalism satisfies all of the success conditions.

### References

Honderich, T. (2004), *On Consciousness* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).